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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON SYRIA'S PULLOUT FROM  
LEBANON

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, March 6, highlights President Assad's decision to pull back Syrian troops from Lebanon. A number of commentaries discuss the event, arguing that this was a "smart" move in order to thwart "schemes against the nation".

Editorial Commentary

-- "Syria withdraws from Lebanon"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/06) editorializes: "The Syrian President set at date for the beginning of the end of a situation that lasted thirty years; a situation that had to come to an end one way or another after all the debate about the Syrian presence in Lebanon that followed the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the angry reaction it received from all parties. This makes us believe that this region is facing explicit and implicit pressures that force the smart leaders to understand the game and take the appropriate position in order to come out of it safely.. President Bashar Assad knows very well what is going on around his country in Iraq and Palestine, and has the courage to make the right decision. He, of course, realizes that the Arab leaders, who advised him to thwart any opportunity for those with ill designs for this region, did so out of concern for Syria. The region has seen real disasters. Decision-makers therefore must learn a lesson from what happens as a result of miscalculations, because it is the duty of the leaders of the nation to preserve the security, stability and safety of our countries and our people. This does not mean giving in or collapsing before pressures, but rather deflating and defusing them and thwarting evil intentions.. We hope that Syria's decision to withdraw from Lebanon will bring to a close this matter, in which we see foreign schemes acting against the safety of all the Arab countries. We also hope that the Lebanese leadership will take the initiative towards maintaining Lebanon's unity and stability and undertake the necessary steps to reorganize its internal status and its relationship with Syria."

-- "America's joy that will not be complete"

Columnist Yaser Abu Hilaleh writes on the op-ed page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (03/06): "America wants an immediate Syrian pullout from Lebanon. Ok. But there are certain facts that should be remembered. Who brought the Syrian 'occupation' to Lebanon? Why was the American 'liberation' delayed? The Syrians would not have entered a country bordering Israel without Israel's approval first and America's approval second.. The Syrians entered Lebanon after they got the required approvals, because their presence aimed at supporting the Christian militia and standing up to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Lebanese nationalist forces. Indeed, the Syrians were more successful in reining in the Palestinians and those Syrians who fought the Israelis in the October (1973) war were the same soldiers who fought the Palestinians at Tel Za'tar and Tripoli. The Syrian army managed to tip the balance in favor of the Christian militia and marginalize the PLO, which had become the military arm of the Lebanese nationalist movement. And this was an Israeli and an American objective. However, the Americans' did not 'liberate' Lebanon from the Syrian occupation after the departure of the PLO and the defeat of the Lebanese nationalist movement for two reasons. The first was the blow they received from the Shiite Jihad movement when the U.S. Embassy in Beirut was attacked, and the second was the American need for the presence of the Syrian army to regulate the momentum of the Lebanese resistance against Israel.. These facts are just reminders that

the man in the White House is not the inheritor of the legacy of nationalist revolutionary movements but the ruler of a superpower with national interests, and he listens to the pulse of the people only when that pulse is in rhythm with his own interests, otherwise, he is ready to cooperate with the unjust ruler against the oppressed people.. The Syrian army is going to pull out of Lebanon and America is going to find itself face to face with the Lebanese people. What if the majority adheres to the right of Hizbollah to resistance? What if Hizbollah refuses to lay down their weapons, would the American army assume this task? Would America enter the game among the sects? On who's side? the Maronites, the Sunnis, the Shiites? The America that has experienced the resistance in Lebanon and in Iraq knows the seriousness of falling into the Lebanese quagmire, so it does not get involved with a direct military act, but will settle for economic and media pressures on Syria."

-- "The Syrian scene post Lebanon"

Columnist Mohammad Kawash writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (03/06): "We do not think that the American campaign [against Syria] will stop at Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon. There are a great deal of accusations being leveled by President Bush and his administration against Damascus, foremost among them is support for terrorism through relations with opposition Palestinian factions, Hizbollah and Iraq and its lack of control over borders with Iraq. This means that the American President has in his pocket many different accusation cards to play against Syria and he will continue to escalate.. What is coming will be graver and more dangerous, because there is in America's intentions and schemes far more than effecting Syria's military withdrawal from Lebanon."

-- "Syria in the bull's eye: why?"

Columnist Fuad Dabbour writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/06): "The U.S. administration and its partners in the Zionist Entity view Syria's opposition to their project to control and tame the region and use its resources as an obstacle that must be removed by creating problems and lighting the fires of Lebanon so they burn Syria in the process, all the while thinking that this will weaken Syria and force it to succumb. National and pan-Arab opposition to American Zionist schemes that aim to eliminate the Palestinian cause and to strengthen the grip of the occupation of Iraq and then to take control of the region is the duty of all the Arabs and not just Syria. This requires Arabs to stand by Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance movements so they can stand up to the scheme of aggression that targets the entire nation before it becomes too late."

-- "American salt in the markets!"

Columnist and former Jordanian Minister of Industry and Trade Mohammad Halaiqah writes on the back page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (03/06): "We have said before that all that is going on in the region is the aftershock of the Iraqi quake.. Did we really need Saddam Hussein's departure by a military occupation for all this to happen? Did Lebanon need the assassination of a major political leader for resistance to evolve and for Syria to start thinking about withdrawal? Did we need all this bloodshed to be convinced of the need for reforms, democracy, freedom, civil society, transparency and good governance in the Arab world? Could we have listened to the voice of the people without an American recipe or a terrorist bomb? Strange is this that is happening in our Arab world! We have become observers of the event and its repercussions without having any tools to make the event or influence it. It is as if we have no choice but to act reactively."

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